



The Secretary of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

December 18, 1998

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am transmitting to you today the Department of Energy's Viability Assessment of the Yucca Mountain site. The Viability Assessment is essentially a technical status report of the Department's ongoing scientific investigations concerning Yucca Mountain. It brings together data drawn from 15 years of scientific investigation and design work at Yucca Mountain and identifies what the Department has learned about the site and what it believes are the critical areas for additional investigation. Submission of this report to the President and the Congress was directed in the Fiscal Year 1997 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act.

Based on the results of the Viability Assessment, the Department believes that scientific and technical work at Yucca Mountain should proceed. The Viability Assessment is not a decision on Yucca Mountain. It will, however, provide a road map for future work necessary to support a decision in 2001 on whether to recommend the site to the President for development as a repository.

The Viability Assessment summarizes a large technical body of work from field investigations, laboratory tests, models, analyses, and engineering that is described in cited references. The Viability Assessment identifies the uncertainties relevant to the technical defensibility of the Department's analyses and designs, its approach to managing these uncertainties, the status of work toward the site recommendation and license application, its plans for the remaining work, and the estimated costs of completing a license application and constructing and operating a repository.

The Viability Assessment is not intended to be a decision document, but rather, was developed as a program management tool and milestone. The Viability Assessment in no way constrains the Department's further investigations. If new or different issues are identified in response to the Viability Assessment that are important to the evaluation of the suitability of the site, the Department will undertake any necessary investigation into those issues.

In October, I directed the Department's top scientist, Under Secretary Ernest Moniz, to carry out a technical review of the Viability Assessment prior to its formal submission to me. Under Secretary Moniz conducted the review with a team of experts within the Administration. During the review, I met with Nevada State officials and representatives, environmental and industry groups and the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board to hear their views prior to finalizing the assessment. I also toured the Yucca Mountain site on two occasions over the past two months and questioned the scientists working on the project at length about their findings to date. I was very impressed with the high quality of the science that went into the development of the assessment.

Also enclosed with the Viability Assessment are two companion reports - *Analysis of the Total System Life Cycle Cost of the Civilian Radioactive Waste Management Program* and *Nuclear Waste Fund Fee Adequacy: An Assessment*, which update previous versions of the same reports. The cost analysis provides the basis for the assessment of the adequacy of the Nuclear Waste Fund Fee as required by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, only considering the costs associated with disposal of commercial spent nuclear fuel. The assessment identifies key uncertainties in projecting Nuclear Waste Fund balances, including variability in program costs, fund revenues, and economic conditions, however, the results indicate that there is no need at this time to adjust the fee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bill Richardson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bill Richardson

Enclosures